

Sunday 16 - B
Sacred Music Symposium

Sts. Joachim and Ann

21 July 2018

Dear Bishop Perry – a warm welcome to you – and dear brother priests, deacons, parishioners and musicians – all people who are gathered here for his symposium on sacred music to learn, collaborate and enjoy fellowship with one another:

Introduction

Before saying a few words about today’s Readings, I want to express my gratitude to the organizers of this symposium on sacred music. As many of you might know, one of our archdiocesan priorities in these years is to “make every Sunday matter.” This priority contains the added note that steps need to be taken to enhance our celebration of the Sunday Mass by improving the quality of the music, so that the beauty of the liturgy can draw the congregation into ever more profound praise and adoration of God.

In a lecture some thirty years ago, the then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger said so aptly: “Discourse with God goes beyond the boundaries of [the] human. Hence by its very nature the liturgy has everywhere called upon the help of music, of singing, and of the voices of creation.”¹

¹ Joseph Ratzinger, “Liturgy and Church Music,” Lecture at the VII International Church Music Congress, Rome (17 November 1985).

When visiting parishes I am inspired by the dedication of so many of our musicians and choir members. They work hard to prepare music and song for the Liturgy – and for that service we should all be extremely grateful. It must also be said, however, that on occasion they do not “strike the right note,” so to speak. Perhaps it is because we have not provided them with suitable liturgical formation or because the hymnals available are often deficient in providing selections that enable the music to fulfil its role as providing a higher register for the proclamation of the Word.² We cannot repeat often enough what the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council wrote about the relationship between sacred music and the Liturgy:

The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that, as sacred song united to the words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn Liturgy.³

In any case, we need to make it increasingly clear that “not every kind of music can have a place in Christian worship.”⁴ As integral to the

² Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 149.

³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 112.

⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 151.

celebration, music for the Liturgy – granting pride of place to Gregorian chant and the vast repertoire of sacred polyphony – “is to help us sing and pray the texts of the Mass itself, not just ornament it.”⁵ If the music of the Liturgy does not lead us to prayer, then it fails to fulfil its proper role.

Gospel

Now let’s turn to today’s Gospel. It tells us that the Apostles, after the experience of their first mission, have returned to Jesus content at their success but also tired. Filled with understanding of their plight, Jesus wants to give them some relief – and perhaps himself as well. So he plans to take them away, to a lonely place, so they can rest a while (cf. Mk 6:31). Unfortunately for them, “many saw them going, and recognized them ... and arrived ahead of them” (Mk 6:33). At this point, at least, rest was not in the cards for this band of exhausted preachers.

Rather than shooing the people away, claiming that he and his Apostles had a right to needed rest, St. Mark records that, when Jesus saw the crowd, “he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things” (Mk 6:34).

⁵ Alexander K Sample, Pastoral Letter on Sacred Music in Divine Worship (21 January 2013), 2.

First he saw them, then he was filled with compassion, and with that sentiment he taught them. Pope Francis calls these “the verbs of the Shepherd”: to see, to have compassion, to teach. Jesus sees others, even when inconvenient, with a pastoral gaze. His compassion is not merely a human feeling, but that of the Son of God in whom the Father’s mercy is made flesh. From this tenderness comes Jesus’ desire to nourish the crowd with the bread of his Word, that is, to teach the people.⁶

Here, then, the Lord shows himself as both the Teacher and Shepherd of his people. The Old Testament frequently described the Lord as the shepherd of his people. Individuals likewise invoked him as “my shepherd” (Ps 23:1), and the community prayed to him as the “Shepherd of Israel” (Ps 80:1).

In the New Testament, the image of the shepherd expresses great authority and responsibility. Nourishing the flock means that the shepherd must protect them from false teaching, ever ready to defend the sheep from marauders: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (Jn 10:11).

Jesus wants life for us, which comes from obedience to his word. And, as we heard in the well-known Psalm chanted for the Responsorial, he wants to guide us to good pastures where we can be nourished and

⁶ Cf. Francis, Angelus (19 July 2015).

rest. He does not want us to get lost and to perish, but to reach the destination of our journey, which is the fullness of life itself (cf. Jn 10:10).⁷

“Like sheep without a shepherd” is a good description of the spiritual lives of many Christians today. The expression describes those whose lives – or some part of their lives – are directionless, helpless, and very vulnerable to the seductions and attacks of the evil one. “Sheep without a shepherd” are more than just a little lost. They are more than just a little vulnerable. They are facing danger and destruction.⁸

But their – and our – situation is not helpless, for Jesus has his gaze on us; he doesn’t let us, we can say, out of his sight. And he comes to us, who are at least in some way, “like sheep without a shepherd,” with the same compassion that he felt for the pursuing crowd in Galilee.

One of the most powerful and moving reflections on Jesus as the compassionate Shepherd is found in Benedict XVI’s homily on the occasion of the inauguration of his Petrine Ministry on April 24, 2005. While his words might be directed in the first place to bishops and priests, they apply to everyone:

The pastor must be inspired by Christ’s holy zeal: for him it

⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (22 July 2012).

⁸ Cf. Thomas Rosica, Reflections for Sunday 16-B.

is not a matter of indifference that so many people are living in the desert. And there are so many kinds of desert. There is the desert of poverty, the desert of hunger and thirst, the desert of abandonment, of loneliness, of destroyed love.

There is the desert of God's darkness, the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life.

The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. . . . [What then are we to do?]

The Church as a whole and all her Pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance.⁹

Jesus' compassion for us moved him to act, far beyond what any ordinary shepherd would be expected to do for his sheep. As his followers, we too are called to model our life on Jesus the Shepherd, gazing and acting with compassion— and not ignoring — the people entrusted to us; that is, our families, co-workers, colleagues and neighbours near and far.

⁹ Benedict XVI, Homily (24 April 2005).

Conclusion

Let us therefore ask the good Lord to make us ever more aware of the vast deserts in which our contemporaries – and perhaps even we are living today – and knowing those deserts, that he will awaken in us the compassion to nurture them with his saving Word and the presence of his Person.

As we continue this Eucharist, we pray that the Shepherd who became the Lamb of God for us will draw us ever more deeply into the mystery of the Paschal Sacrifice now made present for us.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver